

METT DESTINY WITH YOUR
HEAD UP

Luigi Boccelli

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Meet Destiny With Your Head Up!

Luigi Boccelli was born in Philadelphia in 1900, of Italian parents. At the age of two, after an attack of measles, he became blind. He entered the Overbrook School for the Blind, where Marie Suelke Show found that he had an unusual voice. Later he studied with David Bispham, Henri Scott, Adelaide Gescheidt, Perley Dunn Aldrich, Nicholas Dauty, and Frank Lo Forge. He has made many public appearances, including a recital at Town Hall, New York, and is generally known as "the blind Caruso." His story is one of practical, common-sense courage, indicating what may be accomplished despite a great obstacle.—EDITOR'S NOTE.

MY ENCOUNTER with sightlessness came so early in life that I never have known anything else. From the very start I had to adjust myself to a different kind of life. I could smell the fragrance of the flowers, could hold them in my hand and note their delicate texture. Although it would seem that I always knew that there was something missing, you, who read this article, perhaps do not realize how much beauty we can see in the mind's eye. None of us has ever seen Heaven, but we all indubitably have a picture of some kind of paradise in which happiness will be eternal. Perhaps, through their imagination, the sightless see things which to the ordinary person are concealed. Perhaps we who are blind can meet a person and see his soul, although he may be physically disfigured.

The other night I was singing in a local city and met a young man who had just come back from the battlefields of Italy. He had been sightless for six months. I said to him, "It isn't so bad being blind when you get used to it. You have seen far more of the world than most men see. When you get accustomed to your blindness, what you have seen will all come back to you and you will forget your sightlessness. Get all the education you can, keep up your courage, and fight your way ahead, and you are bound to win."

For instance, when I was studying voice I found in one way that my blindness was an asset. People generally are kindhearted and they are willing to go far out of their way to help one with a handicap, provided it is evident that the sightless individual is hard working, smiling, and cheerful.

Careful Preparation Important

Of course, from his earliest efforts, the sightless individual must realize a certain dependence upon those who have sight, or upon Braille. Few people know that there is a musical Braille and that such a work as, let us say, the "Emperor Concerto" of Beethoven is printed in this notation. A blind pianist can take such a work, memorize it, and go to the instrument and play it. Or he can have some friend or helper play it, and study it in that way. Everything I have learned has been done through these two mediums.

This, however, is not a universal blessing, because if you think a moment, you realize it is absolutely impossible for the blind player to do hurried or careless study. He must be sure of every note from the standpoint of pitch, of rhythm, of tempo, and of expression. If he hurries he is wasting time, as he must learn it all over again. This is one of the reasons why the pianist, Alec Templeton, plays with such extreme precision.

Through these laborious processes it has been possible for me to secure a tremendous repertoire. For instance, I learned the entire oratorio of "Elijah" with David Bispham years ago. With very little preparation I could sing it again with ease. Hundreds of arias I could sing without preparation. You see, a blind musician's library is his mind. He must realize that it is useless to learn a thing unless he can remember it

accurately for many years.

Another handicap which the blind singer has to overcome is that of not being able to look into a mirror. Some blind people do not realize this, and unless they are carefully coached, screw up their features into unpleasant expressions that never would occur if they could see their reflections in a mirror. They distort their mouths, and they require the constant criticism of kind friends to coach them so that when they appear in public, they present a pleasing appearance to the audience.

The great objective is to have the public forget the handicap of the sightless artist. He is not looking for sympathy but wants to be judged entirely by his artistic ability. He avoids any suggestion of making capital of his affliction. That is one of the great factors in the huge success of Alec Templeton, who almost never is thought of as a sightless pianist. Of course, I am not discounting his great originality, extraordinary gifts, and personal charm.

From the standpoint of earnings, I certainly have no complaint. There have been hard times, it is true, but for the most part I have found the public very cooperative. When I was twenty I married. My wife is not sightless and therefore has been of great help to me. I have two boys, both of whom I have sent to college. One is now in New Guinea with the Amphibian Engineers, otherwise known as the Rangers, and my other son is now my personal manager.

Twelve years ago I began to realize that because of the excellence of their performance, there was a genuine, legitimate demand for blind musical artists. Therefore I organized a commercial agency under the name, "Blind Artists Concerts." Hundreds of concerts have been given and the singers and performers have been especially successful with Service clubs and church organizations.

Look Up

The main thing is never to forget that you are in a living world, and make it a point to get as much of that world as possible. Don't pity the blind man. He is likely to have a far better time than you think. I love to dance and swim and I taught my wife how to dance. One of the best bowlers in Philadelphia is a blind man. Don't ask me how he does it. I never saw him. I am very fond of boxing and baseball and have attended many events with my son. He explains the details to me as they happen, and I can



LUIGI BOCCELLI

by Luigi Boccelli

Noted Sightless Tenor

Known as "The Blind Caruso"

make as much noise yelling as anyone near me!

I always have found that those who are working under a handicap either are hopelessly depressed or are forever looking upward toward vanquishing difficulties. I always had wanted to climb a mountain and sense what it meant to vanquish the impossible. Therefore, when my wife and I went on our honeymoon to the mountains in New York State, I surprised everyone by telling them I was determined to climb Bear Mountain. My wife went ahead, and under her direction I made the top without too great danger. When I reached there I wanted to sing, and chose the old Neapolitan folksong, *O Sole Mio*. Later I was told that my voice was heard all through the valleys. It was a great personal thrill and inspiration.

Another bit of advice I would give is to keep interested in everything—the war, politics, but principally the great trends in music, art, and education. The radio and the talking machine have been a godsend to the blind. What is known as "The Braille Talking Book," which is nothing more than huge records of the great literary classics in different languages, has opened a vast vista to the sightless person of today, which is infinitely greater than anything ever imagined by those who lived one hundred years ago.

All Braille books and music (including The Talking Book) are free to the blind. This plan is supervised by the various public libraries in different cities. It is the great trends in music, art, and education. The records, whole plays, read by able readers, have been recorded. The Government (Continued on Page 662)

WAGNER: *Tristan and Isolde*—Excerpts from Act 3; sung by Lauritz Melchior (tenor) and Herbert Janssen (baritone), with the Orchestra of Colon Opera House, Buenos Aires, conducted by Roberto Kinsky, and the Columbia Opera Orchestra conducted by Erich Leinsdorf. Columbia set 550.

There can be no question that this has been a long-awaited recording. Very little of the scene between *Tristan* and *Kurvenal* at the opening of the last act of "*Tristan and Isolde*" exists on records. Not even the ten sides here include a complete representation of it, for several excisions in the text are made. Previously, in a recording made in 1928 by the English singers Widop and Fry, with Albert Coates conducting, we had about three sides, against nine here, devoted to the music Wagner allotted to *Tristan* and *Kurvenal*. In the famous Bayreuth recording of the opera only one side was given up to this music. So, considering the importance of the opera and its popularity with operatic enthusiasts, this recording has been a long-awaited one.

The recording contains one side given up to the orchestral *Introduction to Act III*, and nine sides given over to the music between *Tristan* and *Kurvenal* from the opening words of the former, "*Die alte Weise; was weckt sie mich?*", to the death of *Tristan* at the feet of *Isolde*. The recording ends on an unresolved chord, the questioning effect Wagner acquired in his so-called "Look" motive. The voice of *Isolde*, sung by an unnamed singer, is heard calling *Tristan's* name, so that the realism of the scene is maintained. The scene between *Kurvenal* and the shepherd is not included here; it is, however, to be found in the Bayreuth set.

Wagner's realism as dramatist and composer has long presented problems for singers and stage managers. In this scene *Tristan*, mortally wounded, sings from a couch on the stage, impatiently awaiting the arrival of *Isolde*. Many opera-goers are of the opinion that this is one of the most long-winded and ungrateful scenes Wagner ever devised. Ardent *Tristan* adherents are of the same mind, but they point out—and rightly too—that the importance of this scene in the drama cannot be minimized. The wounded *Tristan* is given music to sing which is highly difficult and, considering his reclining position on the stage, this music assuredly places a strain on his vocalism.

The importance of this scene in Wagner's dramatic scheme has to do with his study of Buddhist philosophy while he was at work on the drama (readers are referred to his own writing on this subject). Suffice it to say, Wagner claimed in this scene that *Tristan's* soul finds a temporary release from his body, during which time he learns that he cannot be freed from the bonds of the flesh while *Isolde* is "still in the realm of the Sun." He curses the day which is the source of all his woe, and calls with exhausted voice on *Isolde* to "quench the Light" and permit the Night to Come. It is in the Night (or the perpetual darkness to life) where the two will be united.

A study of Wagner's use of his leit-motifs during the whole third act shows what importance he attached to Light (the Torch or Ardor Motive) and Night. The whole thing is quite confusing to one who does not accept his interpretation of the *Tristan* legend, which most writers contend is more akin to Eastern philosophy and imagery than to Western.

In recent years the *Tristan* of the Danish tenor, Lauritz Melchior, has been widely acclaimed; his interpretation and singing of the role place him among the great *Tristans* of all time. Melchior's voice today, however, is not what it was a decade and a half ago when he first sang this part. Here, we find the tenor's

Wagner on Records



LAURITZ MELCHIOR AS TRISTAN

by
Peter Hugh Reed

voice constricted in the more difficult passages, more particularly towards the end of the scene when the emotion of the wounded *Tristan* causes him to rashly tear the bandages from his wounds and to rush forward to meet *Isolde*. In the earliest portions of the scene, Melchior's subdued singing conveys the anguish and pain of the character, but later his singing suggests a far healthier and virile man than was the wounded *Tristan*. Janssen as *Kurvenal* provides some smooth and some rough singing. One is made conscious here of the fact that the music which Wagner wrote for both characters is not easy for either singer.

One side of the recording (Part 3) apparently had to be remade, because we find Mr. Leinsdorf and the Columbia Opera Orchestra replacing Mr. Kinsky and the Colon Opera Orchestra. This dubbing-in of another orchestra, however, has been handled so well that we doubt that many listeners will be aware of its existence. The orchestral side of the picture is less impressive here than it is often proved to be in the opera house. Neither Mr. Kinsky nor Mr. Leinsdorf rise above the role of the accompanying conductor. However, the orchestral playing remains competent if not exciting, and the recording is quite realistic.

Corelli: *Sonata in F*, for organ and strings; E. Power Biggs and the Arthur Fiedler Sinfonietta. Vic-

tor disc 10-1105.

It is a far cry from Wagner's frenzied emotionalism to the serene beauty of Corelli's artistry. The beauty and fine feeling of Corelli's music belong to another era—the close of the seventeenth century. It is an era to which we might do well to return, for music in those days was full of assuaging nobility and quiet expressiveness. Tranquility in art would seem to be a lost quality, yet it is one of the essential qualities of all great arts—a quality as ageless and enduring as religious faith. This little ten-inch disc provides a richly rewarding musical experience—an experience to which one can return again and again and never find satiation.

The present sonata is one of the works Corelli wrote for church performance, yet it is not specifically religious music. It should be remembered that composers in Corelli's time wrote works which they called *suonate da Chiesa*, implying they were suitable for church performance, and other works called *suonate da camera*, which were more specifically secular works. In Corelli's time, the present composition might have been heard in its original form for two violins, violoncello with organ or bass (the latter could be supplied by harpsichord), or again it might have been heard played by a small ensemble, as here. Mr. Biggs' part here is not that of a soloist, as he merely supplies the bass. To return to the music, the slow movements of this sonata are filled with poetic poignance, while the quick movements provide rich contrast—the final *allegro* being a truly irresistible bit of Corelli. The performance here is good and the recording satisfactory.

Debussy: *Sonata No. 3* for violin and piano; Joseph Szigeti and Andor Foldes. Columbia Set X-242.

It has always remained a controversial subject whether the three sonatas which Debussy wrote in his last year are or are not valued contributions to his complete work. Compared with some of the composer's earlier works, the sonatas—of which the present work is the third as well as the last composition to be written by Debussy—do not represent his genius very favorably; all three are labored in part, and more than suggest that his illness hampered his creative efforts. Yet

there are moments of the great Debussy, and in this sonata in particular there is some grateful writing for the violinist—writing which is sensitive and finespun as only Debussy could be.

This sonata is both archaic and frankly modern. The opening movement has been called bardic, reminiscent of times long gone by. The second movement brings us into the present, but here the play of imagery which has suggested the barnyard to some is more modern in idiom. The last movement has a modern festival quality. Of all the performances of this work on records, this one seems to us the most persuasive. The refinement of Szigeti's style, his wider range of tonal coloring, and, moreover, his avoidance of sentimentality reveal a type of musicality for which he has long been widely admired and justly praised. His accompanist, Mr. Foldes, provides the essential co-partnership required to make the performance a well-integrated ensemble, and the recording is nicely balanced.

On the last side of the second disc, Szigeti plays a transcription of Debussy's *Clair de lune*, which we believe is less evocative of the moonlit tranquility which the composer intended than is the original piano piece.

Bach (trans. Rachmaninoff): *Partita No. 3* for Unaccompanied violin; played by Sergei Rachmaninoff (piano). Victor disc 11-8607.

Bach: *Toccata and Fugue in E minor*; played by Rudolf Serkin (piano). Columbia disc 71594-D.

As always in the transcription of Bach's unaccompanied violin music, its (Continued on Page 672)

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